

May 19, 2006

Palisades Update:

Comments in on NRC draft EIS; NRC mtg. in South Haven May 23; nuke waste action alert, reprocessing and what Congressman Ehlers from Grand Rapids can do to stop it!

Dear Fellow Opponents to the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant License Extension,

There is lots of exciting news to share!

### **COMMENTS IN!**

We submitted group comments to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on its draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Palisades license extension. A coalition of 27 national, regional, and local groups -- environmental, safe energy, public interest, social justice, religious, and Native American organizations -- submitted comments in opposition to operating Palisades from 2011 to 2031, twenty years longer than its original license allows. This coalition represents well over 200,000 Michigan residents, as well as grassroots groups from six Great Lakes states and two Canadian provinces.

The full comments (45 pages), and the executive summary (6 pages), both dated May 18, 2006, are viewable at: <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/palisades.htm>.

Many thanks to Tanya Cabala at Great Lakes Consulting for coordinating the writing of the comments, to all the groups and individuals who signed on to them, and to all those who helped compile and hone the comments (you know who you are!). This submission to NRC keeps our foot in the door, enabling us to -- among other things -- file federal lawsuits in the future, if the Consumers Energy/Nuclear Management Company/NRC license extension steamroller keeps on rolling, as it seems likely to.

Another exciting development is that the League of Women Voters of Michigan has joined the list of organizations opposing the 20 year license extension at the Palisades nuclear power plant based on the safety reasons cited in the "petition to Elected Officials," i.e. embrittlement, on-site high-level radioactive waste storage concerns, and lack of a solution to the waste disposal problem. We thank the League, and welcome them to our growing coalition!

The petition is posted at the very top of the "Palisades Watch" website given above -- print yourself a copy, get your friends and family to sign it, and send it in to NIRS. We're saving them up to deliver to elected officials at an opportune time. We already have many hundreds of signatures, so let's make it thousands!

### **NRC MEETING IN SOUTH HAVEN, TUESDAY EVENING, MAY 23<sup>RD</sup>! WATCHDOGS NEEDED TO ATTEND!**

There will be an NRC meeting with Palisades operator Nuclear Management Company officials on Tuesday, May 23 at 7:00 p.m. (EDT) at the Holiday Inn Express, 1741 Phoenix Rd., South Haven, MI. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the Palisades End-of-Cycle plant performance assessment. The public can observe the meeting, and will then have an opportunity to speak with the NRC (but not with Palisades officials!) after the "business portion" of the meeting, but before the meeting is adjourned. Please go if you can, and take others with you!

It was at just such a technical meeting, last December, that we first learned about the Palisades "cask dangle" incident over the irradiated fuel storage pool that had occurred over two months earlier but had been kept quiet by both Palisades and NRC. We eventually were able to interest a reporter, Hugh McDiarmid, Jr., in the story, and it ran as a front page article in the Detroit Free Press on March 18, 2006: "Nuclear safety left hanging as crane dangled fuel rods:

Michigan incident got warning but no fine." A summary of this incident – based on NRC and Palisades documents obtained by NIRS through the Freedom of Information Act -- which risked a catastrophic radiation release that could have killed tens of thousands downwind, can be viewed at:

<http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/caskdanglesummaryreport4406.pdf>.

It would be good for concerned citizens to attend this meeting and ask NRC about recent safety-related incidents at Palisades: the Oct. 2005 cask dangle; the April 19, 2006 "bobbing basket of death," a container of highly radioactive materials that floated to the surface of the flooded reactor, raising radiation levels 100-fold and even 1,000-fold in a matter of seconds, exposing one worker to nearly 10% of his ANNUAL radiation dose safety limit in just a matter of seconds; and a May 11, 2006 incident in which a control rod became unexpectedly stuck in the operating reactor core, likely indicating very worrisome age-related wear and tear on a vital safety system. These, of course, are only the three most recent incidents in an long history of safety lapses at Palisades extending back to the reactor's construction forty years ago! If NRC staff try to tell you that the safety concerns you are raising are "out of scope," tell them that safety – and all the lessons that should have been learned over the decades at Palisades, but have not been - IS within YOUR scope, and should be within NRC's, given its supposed mission to protect public health, safety, security, and the environment! If you have any questions for NRC about the meeting, phone Christine Lipa at NRC's regional HQ near Chicago at (630) 829-9619. Or call NIRS at the number below.

### **NUKE WASTE ALERT!**

A dangerous move is on in the U.S. Congress to revive reprocessing of commercial high-level radioactive waste, like that generated at Palisades. Reprocessing involves separating plutonium from waste, supposedly in order to "recycle" it into reactor fuel. But reprocessing has not been done in the U.S. since 1972. That was the year the West Valley, New York commercial waste reprocessing facility shut down after just six years of disastrous operations, leaving behind many highly exposed workers, and a \$6 billion clean up job that has yet to be done – large-scale contamination that severely threatens Lake Erie over time.

In 1975, Grand Rapid's own President Ford banned commercial waste reprocessing to send a message to the world: separating plutonium from waste risks the global spread of nuclear weaponry. President Carter extended and strengthened the ban as the cornerstone of his nuclear weapons non-proliferation policy, which succeeded in convincing several countries – such as Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, and Taiwan – to forego reprocessing. Although President Reagan overturned the ban, commercial reprocessing never re-started in the U.S., largely because uranium fuel coming from mining uranium ore was so much cheaper than plutonium fuel from reprocessing.

But now the Bush administration and Dept. of Energy (DOE) want the U.S. to relapse into reprocessing. Bush requested \$250 million for Fiscal Year 2007 for reprocessing. But the DOE reprocessing plan is so half-baked that even pro-nuclear Congressmen on the House Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee have cut that funding down to \$130 million at this point.

It turns out that U.S. Congressman Vernon Ehlers from Grand Rapids will have a lot of influence over decisions on reprocessing. He is the only nuclear physicist serving in Congress, and serves as Chairman of the Environment, Technology and Standards Subcommittee of the U.S. House Science Committee. Many House Members look to Representative Ehlers for guidance on such questions as nuclear waste reprocessing policy.

We need to generate phone calls, faxes and letters into Rep. Ehlers office, urging him to sponsor an amendment to the House Energy and Water Appropriations bill to cut the funding for reprocessing. This bill could reach the House floor next week, so we need to act quickly. Rep. Ehlers should lead the effort the block a relapse into commercial nuclear waste reprocessing for

many reasons: reprocessing could easily lead to the proliferation of nuclear weaponry worldwide; reprocessing would take forever to get off the ground (50 to 60 years) and would cost an arm and a leg (\$100 billion has been spent worldwide to commercialize reprocessing, but this has largely failed; the National Academy of Science in 1996 estimated it would cost another \$100 billion or more to reprocess commercial waste in the U.S., all at taxpayer expense); it won't solve the radioactive waste problem, but would make it worse, by unleashing large quantities of radioactivity into the environment as a matter of course, and transforming irradiated nuclear fuel into forms even harder to control and isolate from the environment over the long term than the form it is in now.

Rep. Ehlers can be faxed or phoned at his D.C. office, or written, faxed, or phoned at his Grand Rapids office:

Fax 202.225.5144 (please fax letters to DC, as mailing them takes weeks to reach his office given the anthrax precautions being taken)

Phone 202.225.3831

Fax 616.454.5630

Phone 616.451.8383

Mailing Address: 110 Michigan Street, GR, MI 49503.

For more information about reprocessing, contact me, or Michele Boyd at Public Citizen at 202.454.5134. Or see <http://www.nirs.org/radwaste/reprocessing/reprocesshome.htm> or [http://www.citizen.org/cmep/energy\\_enviro\\_nuclear/nuclear\\_power\\_plants/nukewaste/reprocessing/](http://www.citizen.org/cmep/energy_enviro_nuclear/nuclear_power_plants/nukewaste/reprocessing/).

In closing, I'd just like to say thanks for your interest and support. Together, we can stop the Palisades license extension, and stop nuclear waste policies that would make the problems worse, not better!

---Kevin Kamps, Nuclear Waste Specialist, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, 6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 340, Takoma Park, MD 20912  
(and board member of Don't Waste Michigan from the Kalamazoo Chapter)  
Office 301.270.6477x14; Cell 240.462.3216; [kevin@nirs.org](mailto:kevin@nirs.org); [www.nirs.org](http://www.nirs.org).

P.S. The costs of the Palisades intervention are mounting. An anonymous donor fronted \$1,500 towards the effort to submit comprehensive, professional comments to NRC by the deadline, an effort that took weeks and months of work. We need to reimburse that person, who has a big heart, but not a big wallet!

The NRC is also rushing to weaken its embrittlement regulations for the umpteenth time, in order to allow Palisades to keep operating despite its dangerously deteriorated reactor pressure vessel – the worst in the country. We need to stop that regulatory rollback. But we need to hire an expert witness to help us with this technically complex matter. The expert has offered to charge us \$75 per hour instead of his usual \$150. This is very generous, but still beyond our reach right now, as his hours will add up quickly.

In short, we need financial donations to make this Palisades campaign go forward at this critical juncture. Please donate in any amount, no matter how large or small, by check or money order marked "Shut Palisades Campaign," to NIRS at the address above.

You can also make a secure on-line credit/debit card donation at <https://secure.campaigne-online.com/registant/donate.aspx?EventID=2927&LangPref=en-CA>.

NIRS is a 501c3 not-for-profit environmental organization, so your donations are tax deductible.